



THE DOCENT NEWS

Of The Tallgrass Prairie Preserve Docent Program



The Nature Conservancy
SAVING THE LAST GREAT PLACES ON EARTH

OCTOBER 2007

For the Volunteers and Supporters of the Oklahoma Chapter of The Nature Conservancy

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DOCENT RECOGNITION LUNCHEON

—Dennis Bires

The Tallgrass Prairie Docent Recognition Luncheon will be held on Saturday, October 20, at 12:15 p.m., at the Ecological Research Station on the Preserve. This is the same day as our first Fall Field Day for docents, also originating at the Research Station. Former Nature Conservancy botanist Kim Shannon will lead a fall wildflower class and walk.

Here is how the two events go together. The Field Day begins at 10:00 a.m. at the Research Station. Kim will begin with a classroom introduction to fall wildflowers and mature prairie grasses. Disregard earlier announcements to bring your own lunch, because at noon we will reconfigure the classroom into a banquet room for a delicious catered luncheon, followed by presentation of service pins and recognition of numerous volunteer service milestones. Luncheon menu: ham, scalloped potatoes, etc.

There will be no time for long-winded

speeches, because at 1:30 p.m. everyone will follow Kim Shannon on a wildflower walk that will end by 4:30 p.m. It is our intention to proceed with the walk "drizzle or shine," so bring appropriate fall outdoor gear.

Plan to attend any or all parts of this all-day get-together, though I can't think of any part I'd be willing to miss. Please make a Luncheon reservation for yourself and spouse or guest by emailing me at:

dennisbires@lycos.com

or calling 918-341-3908, by Friday, October 12. And if you happen to miss the reservation deadline, come anyway. We always order a few extra servings.

HOLLAND HALL SCHOOL VISIT

—Andrew Donovan-Shead

On Thursday, 27 September 2007, sixty-five children, the entire 6th Grade of Holland Hall School, arrived at the Visitor's Center as part of their annual excursion to school-without-doors at Camp Wah-Sha-She. Holland Hall 6th Grade was met by docents Anita



Rosie LoVoi



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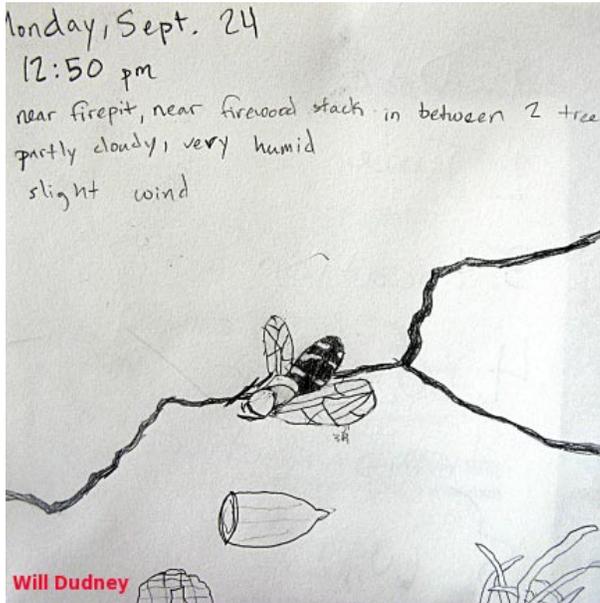


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Springer, Glen Witteman, Bill Rinehart, Dennis Bires, Van Vives, and Andrew Donovan-Shead.

We divided the group in two and sent one



to the trailhead where Van gave them a brief talk about what to expect, after which the children were directed by school staff. We subdivided the group remaining at the Visitor's Center into four groups of eight; two groups went to the bunk house veranda, one at each end; one stayed on the porch of the shop; and one went to wellhouse. We assigned a remaining docent to each group, leaving Anita to supervise the shop.

While we were waiting for the 6th Grade to find its way to us through the thick morning fog, Dennis suggested that we focus our talks on Oklahoma history, the ranch, and where the preserve fits into all this. We agreed that by dividing the children into smaller groups, they would have the opportunity to hear from four different perspectives, enabling them learn more collectively; of course, this assumed that they would discuss among themselves what they discovered.

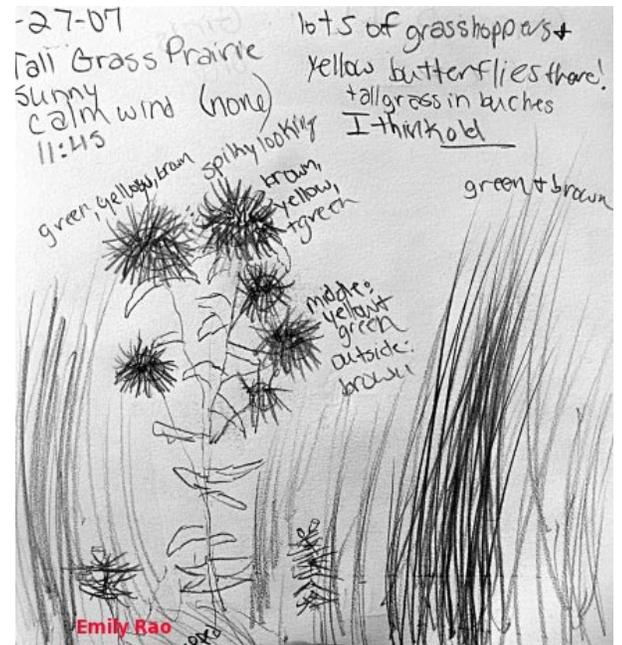
For my part, I interacted with the children by asking questions and waiting for answers. If I didn't get an answer, I just asked another question in an effort to steer them along a path of discovery. We wandered around from question to answer to question to answer just following our noses with me trying to link things into some sort of coherent whole. We ranged far and wide as we sat on

the porch of the bunk house. I felt that I was more engaged with the first group than I was with the second when we were all tired. Overall, the Holland Hall 6th Grade presented themselves as intelligent, articulate, polite, and well-behaved. Some results of their visit can be seen in the digital pictures of the work of students Emily Rao, Kolton Whitmire, Rosie LoVoi, and Will Dudney.

A TRUE CONSERVATIONIST

—Van Vives

We have a hard working conservationist in our midst. Lloyd Stark lives alone in Osage County on Sand Creek. Every week he travels to Bartlesville to buy his groceries. He also drives around to collect any grass clippings and leaves that people put out for trash pickup. He takes his day's collection and works it into the sandy soil in his garden. He has been able to convert the sand into rich productive soil. Is there a lesson to be learned from Lloyd?



INTERACTIVE KIOSK

—Andrew Donovan-Shead

You may remember that, at this year's docent reorientation, we discussed implementation and installation of an interactive information kiosk in the gift shop. While I could build this system, I thought that it would be better done by interested school children. As it happens, I am acquainted with



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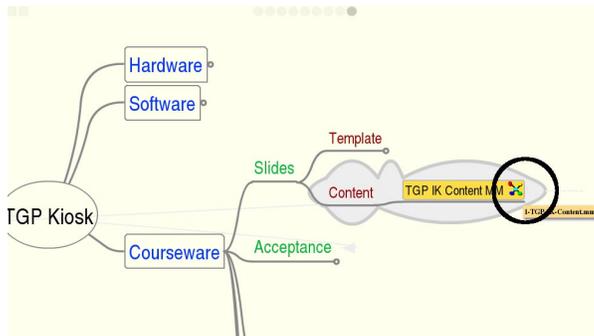
Karen Moore who teaches history at Holland Hall; she was one of the members of staff during the 6th Grade visit to the prairie last month, accompanied by Margaret Armstrong who is the science teacher and Jan Butler who is the art teacher. I proposed to Karen that building the kiosk courseware would be an excellent extra-curricula activity for her middle school students. She agreed and solicited the help of Margaret who was similarly enthusiastic. Together, they are organizing a small team of students to develop the interactive courseware.

We have produced two mind-maps that show our approach to the problem. A top-level map shows the overview and a more detailed map shows the organization of the courseware. These maps are reproduced here. Also, for those of you with access to the Internet, George Pierson has created a page on the www.oklanature.com web-site where you can find the mind-maps on-line at this URL:

<http://www.oklanature.com/kiosk/TGP-Interactive-Kiosk.html>

The maps are interactive in that you can fold and unfold the nodes, follow links, and read the notes underlying the nodes in pop-up windows, when the cursor hovers over a corresponding note icon. Use the mouse scroll-wheel to zoom the image, right-click to reveal a menu of functions, use the buttons across the top of the screen to access other functions.

You can reach the interactive contents planning mind-map by clicking on the icon circled in the detail shown here.



Wikipedia has an article explaining mind maps that says, in part, "A mind map is a diagram used to represent words, ideas, tasks or other items linked to and arranged radially around a central key word or idea. It is used

to generate, visualize, structure and classify ideas, and as an aid in study, organization, problem solving, decision making, and writing."

"It is an image-centered diagram that represents semantic or other connections between portions of information. By presenting these connections in a radial, non-linear graphical manner, it encourages a brainstorming approach to any given organizational task, eliminating the hurdle of initially establishing an intrinsically appropriate or relevant conceptual framework to work within."

We are using mind-maps to help manage and develop the kiosk project. As the project progresses, we will amend the mind-maps to show our progress.



GERRY'S TRAVELING FUNERAL

—Van Vives

This interesting story began a short while ago when a visitor to the prairie wrote in the comments column of the register that "Gerry's ashes were spread on the prairie." Iris McPherson found the entry when she was compiling data on the visitors for the month. She wrote to me telling me what she found. I asked her who the person was that signed the register and she said Judith Alford from Port Townsend, Washington. This really stimulated my curiosity. Why would someone come all the way from Washington to spread someone's ashes? I thoroughly enjoy doing detective work on the internet. I got on Good Search (as good and as fast as Google and it donates one cent for each search to your favorite charity; mine is Martha's Task) and



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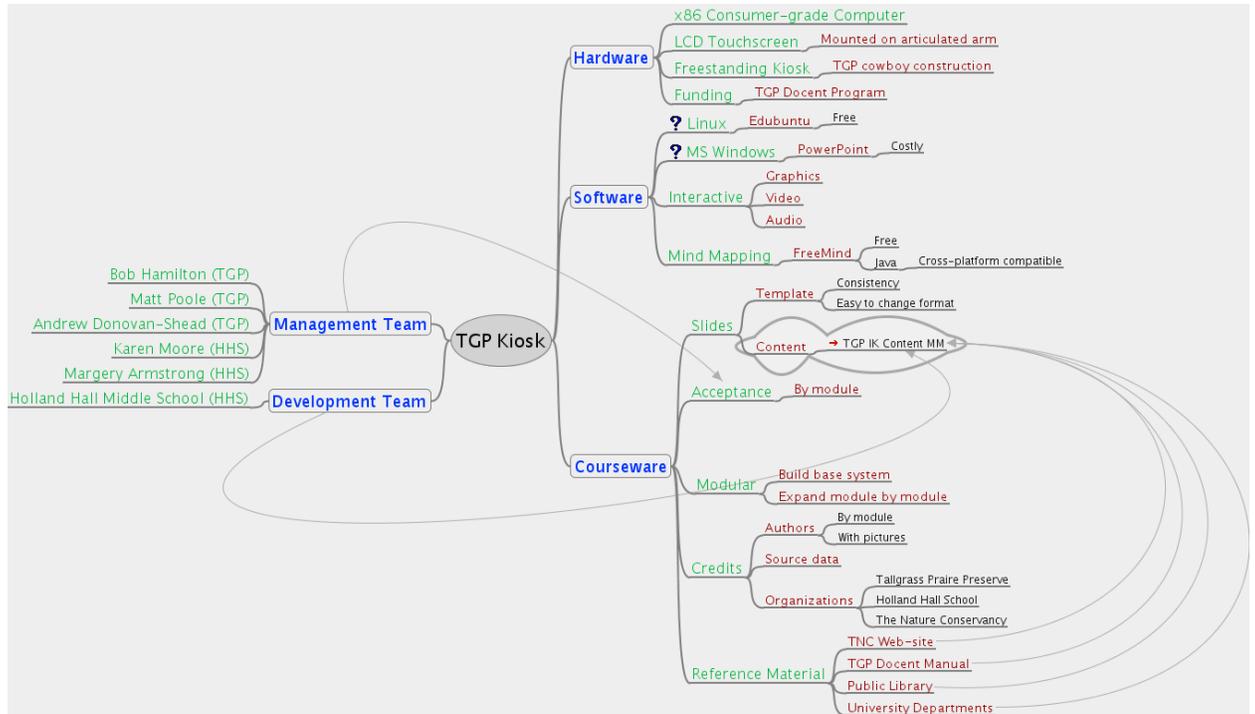
traced Judith Alford to Port Townsend as expected. Then I looked for a site for Port Townsend and immediately found a great lead. A story was titled, "Finding a Rare Treasure and a Tribute to Gerry Hyatt Bergstrom." Could this be the Gerry of "Gerry's ashes?"

The article was written by Donn Ring, an apparent botanist and he described a beautiful little blue wildflower called Piper Bellflower that grows on the harsh, exposed ridgetops of the Olympic Mountains, the sole habitat for this flower on our planet. About 20 years ago a good friend of his and an ar-

odically ejaculating paroxysms of elation."

Later he saw Gerry at the Farmer's Market and as usual she greeted him with, "Have you found it yet?" He told her about his finding like a little boy telling his mother that he found a penny on the sidewalk.

The last part of the article was about Gerry. She died of cancer at the age of 61 after a courageous battle. She had moved to Port Townsend 30 years ago. She was a trained operatic soprano, an accomplished pipe organist, a teacher of music and voice,



dent lover of wild flowers, Gerry Hyatt Bergstrom, had related information that she had found an extremely rare variety of the Piper Bellflower that was pure white, and the only place it had been found was on Eagle Peak. Gerry kept asking him if he had found the rare white variety yet. After 20 years of searching he had not.

On August 2, 2006, he was heading up towards Eagle Peak ridge and he looked up and about 700 feet below the summit on a vertical rock was a clump of white flowers. He carefully climbed the rock and held his camera as high as he could and took a picture of the clump. Sure enough, it was the rare species. How many times had they walked past that area and did not see it. He describes their joy as "We were like Pentecostal inebriates peri-

and an organizer of musical groups and events. What the general public did not know was Gerry's passion for wild flowers of the Olympic Peninsula. Her older sister, Mary Jo Hyatt Laughlin, deceased, was the official wildflower artist for the state of Texas. Her paintings are displayed at the Botanical Museum in Dallas.

As an aside, I found a recording by Gerry Hyatt Bergstrom of an aria from La Boheme on the Internet. You can listen to it at:

<http://www.ptleader.com/main.asp?SectionID=68&TM=85083.89>

I found this all so very interesting, but it did not answer the connection between Gerry Hyatt Bergstrom and the Tallgrass Prairie. So I got Judith Alford's address and wrote her.



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She wrote back giving me the answer along with three long letters, Chapter One, Chapter Two, and Chapter Three of "Gerry's Fabulous Traveling Funeral." Judith Hyatt Alford is Gerry's sister.

And then she answered my question. All of the Hyatt girls were born in Tulsa. They attended Will Rogers High School and went to Tulsa University. She gave me a little more information on Gerry. She was the organist for the First Presbyterian Church in Port Townsend and their father was pastor. Gerry organized and directed the first Community Chorus in Port Townsend 35 years ago.

Her Chapter 2 begins the saga of the traveling funeral. Before Gerry died she discussed with Judy what she would like to be done with her ashes. She had two specific requests. She wanted part of her ashes to be scattered in the Sea of Cortez with the dolphins and the second was to scatter her ashes in the Sol Duc River when the salmon are spawning. She said Judy could do whatever she wanted with the rest. Judy knew that she had a great love for the Tallgrass Prairie and had visited there on visits back to Tulsa. So Judy decided that part of her ashes should be spread on the prairie.

Robin, her brother-in-law, and Judy traveled to Rocky Point, Cholla Bay, Mexico and stayed with relatives. They borrowed a large sailboat and searched for the dolphins. They traveled quite a way from port, but there were no dolphins to be seen. Time was running out and they needed to head for home. So they got the urn of ashes and passed it around to everyone as each said a few words to Gerry. Then they scattered the ashes in the sea. Everyone was in tears and they embraced in a huge hug. Someone in the group yelled for everyone to look aft. There, where they scattered the ashes, were dolphins cavorting among Gerry's ashes. Who can explain?

Sometime later Judy and her sister Janet left Richardson, Texas, for Tulsa. Thirty miles down the highway Judy asked Janet with concern if she remembered to take Gerry's ashes. Janet assured her that Gerry was in the back seat. They burst out laughing, then they shared a prayer. They went to Broken Arrow where Judy Barto, a great friend lived. Then they headed for their destination, the Tallgrass Prairie. It was lunch time when they got to Pawhuska and had a meal at the Chuckwagon Café. When they got to the Prair-

ie they saw two herds of bison and felt very privileged.

The three of them started walking on the trail looking for the best place to scatter Gerry's ashes. The wild flowers were not as profuse as they had been earlier in the summer. Fortunately the Butterfly Weed was in bloom and they found one that had beautiful orange/red blooms. They knew that this was the spot. They said a few words and scattered Gerry's ashes over the brilliant flowers. The tears flowed and they gave each other a hug.

On the way back to Pawhuska they felt a need for iced coffee and pie. They went back to the Chuckwagon Café and this time took Gerry with them. You can imagine the look on the waitress' face when they ordered iced coffee. "I can see you're not from around here!" They tried to assure her that they were all born in Tulsa. The waitress was curious about the ceramic urn sitting in the middle of the table. She really didn't know how to react when they told her it was their dear sister, Gerry. She got over the shock and ended up giving each of the women a warm hug.

And so ends the saga of "Gerry's Fabulous Traveling Funeral."

BEWARE THE BISON

—Andrew Donovan-Shead

The Associated Press reports that a man was gored by a bison on Santa Catalina island. Apparently, the man was about twenty feet from the bison when he and the animal made eye-contact, whereupon the bison charged, gored the running man from behind in the upper thigh and tossed him in the air. The man survived with a fractured pelvis.

Please heed the notices, beware of bison, and warn visitors to be careful and remain in their cars.

BIODIVERSITY

—Van Vives

There are words that we are familiar with and we use them and find them in many texts, and we feel that we know exactly what they mean. That is, until someone asks us for the definition. I think that "biodiversity" is one of those. Biodiversity and loss of biodiversity are terms that are used not only by dedicated scientists, but they are used by elementary and high school students, the gener-



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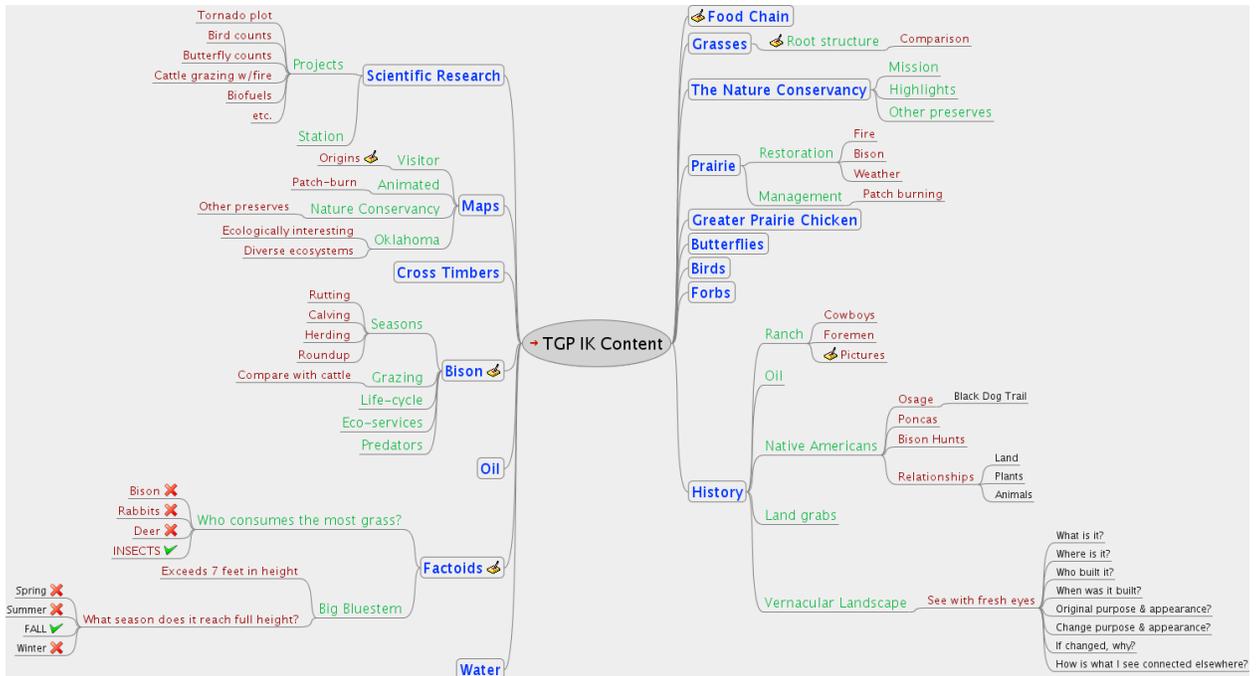
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al public, and now they are prominent in the area of politics. Not only that, but also the areas encompassed by those terms become more and more complex with time.

Biodiversity can be defined as the diversity of life in all its forms and at all levels of organization. When we say "all its forms" we mean that it includes plants, fungi, bacteria, invertebrate animals, vertebrates, mammals, etc. The "levels of organization" means genetic, species, and ecological diversity.

habit at a given point in time. But how large does a community have to be to be called an ecosystem? A puddle of water in a decaying log might be called an ecosystem — by its inhabitants. One might point to a small forest area and say it is a woodland ecosystem, but how many sub-ecosystems exist within it? Also there is the matter of time to consider. How long does an ecosystem have to exist to be called a unique ecosystem? All these are complications the scientists have to contend with.



Multicellular organisms appeared on Earth about 4,500 million years ago. Organisms began 440 million years ago. About 290 million years ago the dinosaurs lived and died out. Mammals appeared 250 million years ago and humans 1.8 million years ago. On an average it is estimated that a species naturally lasts 1 to 10 million years before extinction. Five points throughout this time period there have been mass-extinctions. We are currently in the middle of the sixth period of extinction — caused by humans. It is impossible for man to determine exactly how many species there are at any one time. It is estimated that there are in excess of 100,000 species, of which only 20,000 have been identified.

Ecosystems can be defined as a group of interacting organisms, often called a community, and the physical environment they in-

Is biodiversity important to us? Well, without it we would probably be dead, as we would have no food to eat, the climate would be radically different, our effective medicines that we get from plants would be gone, etc. We have an estimated 250,000 species of flowering plants, but the food supply of 146 countries is supplied by only 103 species. It would be catastrophic if only half of these 103 species went extinct.

Over 90-percent of all species that have ever lived are now extinct. There are, however, more species now than ever before. The rate of creation of species exceeds the rate of extinction. If we do not take care of this planet the rates can reverse and man will be one of the extinct species.



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THE DOOMSDAY VAULT

—Van Vives

Catastrophes happen. Sometimes caused by nature, but often by man himself. In 2002 the Taliban destroyed Afghanistan's seed bank containing carefully collected seeds. In it were seeds to help that nation rebuild the capacity to feed themselves. The looters took the plastic and glass jars and dumped out the seeds. They were only interested in the containers. The seeds were salvaged, but now they are an unidentified mixture. The collection had been a representation of the diversity of native crops. Terrorists ransacked an international potato seed bank in the Peruvian Andes in the late 1980s.

There are seed banks in many countries, but they are not protected from natural or manmade disasters. There are companies that offer seeds of heirloom plants. There are seed collections that function as a library. You can withdraw a certain amount of seeds, but you must return seeds of the same variety at the end of the season. These banks are our only way of preserving the genetic diversity of plants.

A Doomsday Vault is being built on a small Norwegian island 1000 kilometers from the North Pole. Temperatures are always freezing. A large concrete room on a mountain side is designed to hold two million seeds. The seeds will represent all known vari-

eties of the world's crops. The purpose is to safeguard the world's food supply against nuclear war, climate change, terrorism, rising sea levels, earthquakes and the collapse of electricity supplies. If need be, this would allow us to reconstruct agriculture on the planet. Seed collecting will be in the hands of the Global Crop Diversity Trust.

NO TRASH SERVICE

At the Visitor's Center there is no trash service, therefore please carry away your trash for disposal at home. White plastic kitchen trash bags should be available in one of the sink-unit cupboards, to replace filled bags in the waste baskets.

NEWSLETTER PUBLICATION

Deadline for submission of articles for inclusion in the newsletter is the 10th of each month. Publication date is on the 15th. All docents, Nature Conservancy staff, university scientists, philosophers, and historians are welcome to submit articles and pictures about the various preserves in Oklahoma, but of course the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in particular.

NEWSLETTER BACK ISSUES

Back issues of the Docent Newsletter, to September 2007, can be found in the two green zip-binders, stored in the Perspex rack by the file cabinet in the office of the Visitor's Center.





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Oklahoma City Office	405-858-8557
Tallgrass Prairie Preserve	918-287-4803
J.T. Nickel Wildlife Preserve	918-456-7601
Pontotoc Ridge Preserve	918-585-1177
Four Canyon Preserve	580-488-2657